

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

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PENSTEMON SPECTABILIS
LARGE BLUE PENSTEMON

Prepared
by
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
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NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

PENSTEMON SPECTABILIS

LARGE BLUE PENSTEMON

Scrophulariaceae

Figwort Family

A large, erect perennial, growing to a height of about 4 ft., often equally broad. Herbage glabrous and glaucous, light green. Leaves opposite, the lower with petioles about 1 in. long, blades 3 to 4 in. long, ovate to oblanceolate, coarsely but irregularly toothed, upper leaves connate, becoming increasingly smaller upwards. Inflorescence a large narrow panicle 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. long, bearing from 50 to 100 or even more flowers. Sepals 5, green, about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. long. Corolla 2-lipped, 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. long, glandular puberulent, broadly funnelform, lavender but lighter at base, the upper 2 lobes somewhat smaller than the 3 lower, all purplish or blue. Stamens 5, the upper one sterile, glabrous, almost straight, the others in two pairs, curved, the upper pair shorter than the lower. Anthers 2-celled, the sacs widely spreading. Style $\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, with a curved, entire stigma. Ovary superior, 2-celled, becoming a tough straw-colored capsule containing numerous, angular, black seeds.

Penstemon spectabilis was described in 1857 by Thurber, an American botanist, from specimens apparently collected in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mts. of Southern California. The generic name means five and stamen and was given because many of the members of this family have only 4 to 2 stamens. Penstemons are abundant in western North America. California has at least 50 distinctive forms, some of which are to be found in nearly every region of the state. Most kinds are especially beautiful and range in color from white to blue, purple, yellow and red shades.

Penstemon spectabilis is known in the wild from northern Los Angeles Co. to northern Baja California. It ranges from the coastal foothills to the mountains bordering the desert, but does not occur directly on the coast nor on the deserts. After a burn or on disturbed soils it frequently becomes a dominant plant for a year or two and makes gorgeous displays over large areas. We have seen it take over abandoned fields near San Bernardino and create a mass of color not to be surpassed in any cultivated flower garden. It prefers full sun,

light, sterile rocky soils, such as decomposed granite or sandstone. Wild plants bloom mainly in April and May and ripen their seeds in July and August. Seeds are easily harvested since the somewhat woody capsules do not split open immediately.

Large Blue Penstemon is very easily grown from seeds planted in seed flats in the fall or spring. Germination takes from 2 to 4 weeks and the seedlings will be ready to transplant to small pots in about 2 months. In another 2 months they can be set out in the ground and will make fine plants. If larger plants are desired they may be repotted, but the former procedure enables the plants to form a better root system. Sterile, sandy or coarse, well drained soil is essential and a location in full sun is preferred. The species may be grown in heavier soils, but the plants are likely to die out during the winter wet season and will also be short-lived. Some flowers will be produced the first spring on plants started the preceding fall, but the plants need another year to attain full growth and to produce abundant flowers. The life of a cultivated plant is probably not over 4 years. Richest shades are produced in the flowers if the plants are comparatively dry at the time the flower spikes begin to open. Where water is applied during the spring and summer the blooming period may be prolonged, but the finest flowers are produced during April, May and June.

The 2 to 3 ft. flowering stems of the Large Blue Penstemon make exquisite bouquets because of the delicate intergradations of blue, purple and lavender tones in the flowers, which blend with the clean glaucous, light green of the stems and leaves. Bouquets will last 4 to 5 days, but usually drop a few flowers shortly after picking. This difficulty may be largely eliminated if the stems are submerged in a large container for a few hours before arranging in a vase.

Penstemon spectabilis rightly lays claim to its specific name, for it is one of the showiest of all of the California species of Penstemon. Seeds and plants are offered for sale by some of the dealers in California Native Plants.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted
to the growth and study of the native plants
of California for their botanical, horticult-
ural and popular features.

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MAIL ADDRESS

R. F. D., Anaheim, California

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